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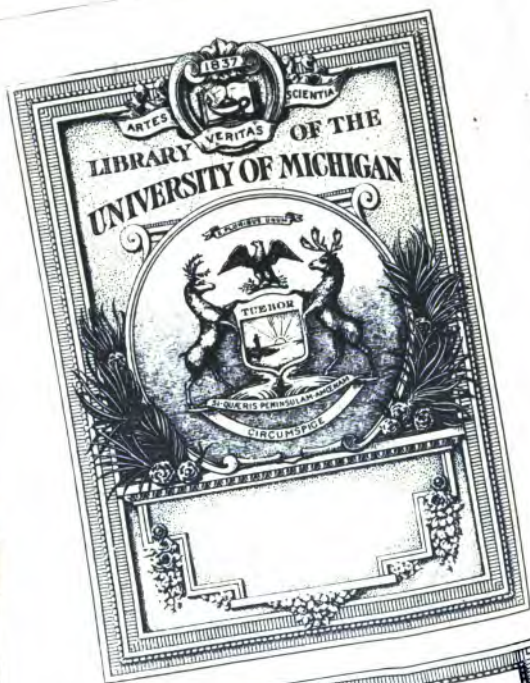
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KINGS IN BABYLON

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE BURDEN OF ENGELA

A BALLAD-EPIC

THROUGH HUMAN EYES

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST

A MASQUE

THE PASTOR OF WYDON FELL

A BALLAD

EAGER HEART

A CHRISTMAS MYSTERY-PLAY


KINGS IN BABYLON

A DRAMA

BY
A. M. ^{ALICE}BUCKTON

AUTHOR OF
"EAGER HEART: A CHRISTMAS MYSTERY-PLAY"

METHUEN & CO.
36 ESSEX STREET W.C.
LONDON



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We are allowed to announce that Mr. FREDERICK HARRISON will give a Matinée of KINGS IN BABYLON at the HAYMARKET THEATRE early in the Season 1907

Music by GUSTAV VON HOLST, for Choir and Orchestra, embodying ancient Hebrew Chants and Melodies



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*The Emblem on the cover of the book
is that of Aūramazda, the symbol of
Divine victory and protection, brought
by the Persians into Babylon*

10222

Place: BABYLON

Time: 572 YEARS B.C.

Act I.: A HOUSE-TOP IN THE JEWISH
QUARTERS BY THE RIVERSIDE:
AN HOUR BEFORE SUNSET

Act II.: THE TERRACE ON THE SOUTH
WALL OF THE KING'S PALACE,
OVERLOOKING THE GARDENS,
THE RIVER, AND THE CITY:
EARLY MORNING

PERSONAGES

The KING

MELCHAR his Chamberlain

NERGAL the Captain of the Host

Two PERSIAN PRINCES

RACHEL a Jewish Singing Girl

Three JEWISH SERVING MAIDS

BEN ISRAEL an aged Exile from Jerusalem

SHUPHAM an Artificer

His MOTHER

MARA his Sister

JUDITH a younger Sister

CALEB his young Brother

YOUTH his Assistant

Another ARTIFICER and his Friend a SCRIBE

CHALDEAN ASTROLOGER

PRIESTS of the Temple of Bel and

NOVICIATES of the same

Sacred Dancing Girls

Cup-Bearer, Heralds, Messengers, Slaves, Scribes, Fan-Bearers, Servants of the Court

Jewish and Chaldean Populace

} *Jews*

KINGS IN BABYLON

ACT I

Introductory music resolving itself, as the lights in the theatre are lowered, into an ancient Hebrew psalm, "By the Waters of Babylon," sung by unseen singers. Before it dies away the curtain rises, discovering a house-top in Babylon by the riverside. A vine-trellis and tattered awning protect the wall L. from the heat of the afternoon sun, which casts long shadows. Beyond and below is the river, on which appear the masts and sails of feluccas in the setting sun; small white houses lie dotted on the farther bank of the river. Near the horizon is seen the temple of Babel in a rose-coloured mist.

Steps descend from the house-top to the centre of the terrace in front, and exit downwards on the right behind a low parapet. Near the vine-trellis and the awning, SHUPHAM,

the artificer, is seen at work, fashioning part of a golden wheel, and setting jewels in the rim. A YOUTH helps him with tools.

MARA, a young woman, haggard and dishevelled, is seen standing looking over the river from the house-top; she rocks a sick child in her arms.

Her mother, a grey-haired woman with a sorrow-worn face, kneels on the terrace in front, with a younger daughter, JUDITH, beating out corn with stones on a sail-cloth, a rough quern beside her. CALEB, the boy, sits on the ground near her, occupied with a toy wheel, which he is making in imitation of the great disc of his brother's workshop.

The chant in the city dies away in the distance. There is a moment's silence, in which the mother sighs, puts back the veil from her head, and looks across at her daughter.

Mother. Is the child sleeping still?

Mara. Hush! not so loud!

He stirred a little in my arms, and now
Has fallen back again, heavily breathing.

[MOTHER rises and goes over to her,
and looks long at the child.

Mara. His hair is wet; I think the fever
bates.

The hot South wind has tried him, but to-night
'Twill surely lessen! 'Tis the third day now.
Hush, little one! Aru! aru! aru!

[She goes up and down with it.

MOTHER *stoops to prepare some
rough cushions in the corner (R.).*

Judith *[pauses in her work, and speaks sul-*
lenly]. The child is cursèd! Wherefore
let it live?

And Mara mad! Where is her proper sense
Of maidenhood? To think that this should be!
And the shame of Babylon be branded here
Upon our doors! A blight upon the land,
And on the saffron fields, where Jewish maids
Are set to gather dyes!

Mother. Prithee, daughter,
Is this the hour to scourge the fallen?

Judith *[indignantly turning away]*. Oh,
The degradation of it all! What more
Could heaven heap on us? The poison breath
Of this great city, like a full-fed beast,
Scorches our wholesome memories, and makes
Of the old traditions dust! Is no one left
To gather up the people of the Lord,
And snatch the remnant, even but a few,
Out of this seething pot of wickedness?

*[The voice of an old man is heard in
the city streets below:]*

Woe to my city! she that sits alone,
The virgin daughter of Zion, desolate!
That once was called the joy of all the Earth!
[MARA *looks up wildly, and stands still.*

The voice continues:

Of all her lovers is there none to rise
And take her by the hand and lead her forth?
Her strong young men have failed her, and
her sons . . .

[*The voice goes further.*

Shupham [*listens, looks up from his work,
and repeats*]. Her strong young men
have failed her, and her sons. . . .

I will not fail her! . . .

Judith [*scornfully*]. You! you will not fail
her?

What thing is that, yonder, thy hands have
made

To magnify the idolater, and crown
The great god Bel? Those very hands that
fashioned

The lavers for the priests in high Jerusalem,
Her sacred bowls, and many a silver flagon,
Now beautify her enemies!

Shupham.

Taunt me not!

What do you ask of me, you that would
starve

Did I not toil and labour, night and day,

To house you all! I know as well as ye
The thing I seem! What is this King that
dares

So to misuse the people of the Lord?
Making them creatures to abet his gods,
And glorify his throne!

Mother. Blame not the King!

Shupham. Yea, I *shall* blame the King!

'Tis he himself

Is Bel and lord! Himself is Babylon!
Oh, 'tis a cunning heart past measuring!
Wherefore else did he plant us by the ships,
Forfeiting of us all our flocks and herds—
Why did he bring us hither, but to wean
And snare us from the old? tempting the soul,
All dispossessed and barren of its own,
With tricks of barter and of trafficking?

Judith [mocking]. Have we not fall'n to it
with appetite,
Praising his flesh-pots, and the honeycombs? . . .

Shupham. Oh, 'tis a monstrous and unholy
thing!

Who are his teachers? Whence is he informed?
How could he know the secret of this hand,
Swift in carnelian work and chrysoprase,
Boring more truly the rest? And send
His chamberlain to stand and dazzle me,
Feeding with devilish art my native pride,

And name me to the Court, King's artificer!
I'll pay him yet, in a day he looks not for't!

*[His mother makes as though she
would interrupt him.]*

I know—I know what you would say! too
late! . . .

Yon fiery wheel, think you I love it not?
Child of my fancy, image of my brain,
Whose jewelled radiance mocks the very sun
That kisses it? See you the choice of stones?
Jasper and ruby, emerald, amethyst,
The Rainbow caught in dewdrops, crystallised!
O, I could gaze on it, and gaze on it—
And lose my soul with gazing! One more
rim,

Ebony laid, and pressed with gold dust! Boy,
Where is the tool?

*[YOUTH hands him tool, he goes to
wheel and bends over it.]*

Caleb. I, too, have got a wheel!
See how it runs and sparkles as it goes!

[He tries it along the top of a step.]

*[MOTHER returns to gather up the
corn. MARA has seated herself
on the cushions, rocking the child.]*

Judith [to boy]. Rachel would bid you throw
that toy away!

Caleb. No, no, I want it!

Shupham [*impatiently*]. There! the point
has split
Under my hand! a plague upon the tool!
'Tis like to Rachel! She's another case!

Mother. What thing has Rachel done?

Shupham. What rather left
Undone! Two months it is since first she went
A singer to the court, to live softly,
And wear brave broideries! and not one bath
Of rye or millet, not one cor of grain
Has sent to help thee—thee who rescued her
And nursed her as a ewe lamb with thine own,
Catching her up out of the streets of blood,
That terrible night, utterly orphaned! Say,
What one request has moved her stubborn lips
For thee to the King they say she pleaseth
well?

Mother. Rachel has other thoughts! Leave
you, prithee,
Her name in peace!

Shupham. Aye, vain and foolish thoughts,
And deeds that wreck the plans of wiser men!
Rachel is headstrong—moves and works alone!
There's danger in it! What was that we heard?
The King had called for the song of Miriam
To grace his latest victory—and she—
Refused! The King, they say, grew dark and
pale

And nothing said ; but be you very sure
That he forgets not ! all the Court did tremble !

Caleb. But Rachel did not tremble !

Shupham. How now, chit !

What knows your infant wisdom ?

Caleb [*nods his head gravely*]. I—I know !

Shupham. A pretty pupil here of Rachel's
school !

Good logic this !

Mother. Son, speak not ill of her.

From that first day she entered in our home
Hath she behaved in all things as a daughter !
Is it nought that a maiden, royal born,
Of David's house, drew water for us here
These many years ?

Shupham. I quarrel not with that !

Mother [*fondly*]. O foolish boy, have I not
cautioned thee

Oft and again, to set thy thoughts at rest
Concerning her ? She thinketh not of thee.
Look elsewhere !

[*SHUPHAM turns sullenly to his work.*

Mara [*rising*]. Would she were here to-day,
Then might she give me comfort of the
child,

Coax him as she was wont, preparing him
Some little cooling drink to still his thirst.

[*She walks up and down as before.*

A Voice [calling in the city below].

Cry ye no more—Woe is my people, woe!
Arise, Daughter! and draw the bridal veil
Over thy face, and go to meet thy Lord.
He tarries not! To-morrow shall He stand
Beside the door! . . .

*[MOTHER looks over the wall of the
house-top.]*

Judith [scornfully]. To-morrow shall it be!
To-morrow is the crowning shame of all!
Must not Bel in a blazing car of gold
Be drawn from the furnace doors, and on his
knees
Yon wheel set up? the wheel our brother
makes . . .

For the sport of all the people? See you not
All Babylon agathering there to worship?
Lydians, Medes, and Elamites, and Jews!
Aye, Jews! the chosen seed of Abraham.

A Voice [from the street]. To-morrow shall
the King inquire for you!

Shupham. Who is it calls?

Mother. The man Ben Israel.

Shupham [aside]. The man Ben Israel!

Mother. He that of late

Sits by the water-slucie in the Southern wall!

Shupham [aside]. Sits by the water-slucie in
the Southern wall? . . .

Mother. He hath a strange compassion on
the people.

They follow him : they hang upon his words !
He standeth even now beside the gate,
And greets the warder, holding him in converse.

Shupham [aside]. Holds him in converse?

Knows he the warder, then,
That keeps the keys?

Mother [stops and looks on him earnestly].

My son, what thing is this ?

Long have I seen thy thoughts turned in-
wardly,

Conceiving plans to us unknown. Be warned !

Revolt is not for us. Have we not seen

The end of all revolt? Another way

The Lord will surely open.

Mara [cries suddenly in terror]. Mother,
come !

Oh, come ! What is it turns his eyes so dark,
So wide to heaven? He quivers ! now is still.

O God, it cannot be !

*[She looks close into the face of the
child.]*

*[MOTHER hastens to her with raised
hands, in silent sympathy; she
looks to heaven, bends and touches
the child. All eyes watch them
in suspense.]*

Mother. Cover him, daughter!
And bring him gently, bring him gently down
Into the house.

[*They go down R. CALEB, frightened, runs beside them, holding his wheel. JUDITH, SHUPHAM, and YOUTH look after them in silence. A cry of woe and passionate weeping reaches them from below. The sun has set.*

Judith [rousing herself, and gathering up the corn in the cloth]. So that is the end!
Good!

One shame the less. [Exit R.
Shupham [rouses himself from his amazement]. Boy, fetch another tool!

[YOUTH starts as one from a trance, searches among the tools on the rough stand, and offers one.

Shupham. What thing is this? [*flinging it away*] where are your senses, eh?
Wandering as ever? Fetch the little lamp.

[YOUTH fetches it from a corner, and places it before the wheel.

Shupham. The last remaining edge is yet to fill,

Then all is done, and thou shalt have thy pay!
[Places gold from his wallet on bench.

Youth. I take it not!

Shupham. How now! art sickening,
Thou, too, with this same feeble fear to
touch

The Babylonian gold?

Youth. I like it not!

[*He shades his eyes.*

Yon flaming wheel covers me with its light. . . .
It burns my flesh. . . . I cannot take the
gold.

Pray keep it you!

Shupham. Why then, 'tis nought to me.
I'll keep it till the day thou pray me
for it!

Art thou wiser than Moses? Shall not we
Spoil the oppressor as our fathers did,
And make another Pharaoh of this King?

[*A slow double knock is heard.*]

Shupham. Hush! hush! [*Knock is repeated.*]

The signal! can it be? So late?

Listen! [*Knock is repeated.*] 'Tis they! Here,
take the chest of tools.

Put by the Shittim wood and tortoiseshell,
And bring me out the waxen model keys
That thou hast made!

[*YOUTH fetches a parcel in a cloth
from a corner.*

Go now, and bid them enter! [*YOUTH exit, R.*

SHUPHAM *unwraps the keys, examines them eagerly under the lamp, listens, and covers them again. Enter a dark, powerful man, an ARTIFICER, and his friend, a young SCRIBE, bearing a roll. They greet with some ceremony.*

Shupham. Welcome! The hour is late! I hardly hoped

For you to-night.

Artificer. We had been earlier,
But for a surging crowd from the riverside
Without the walls! We scarcely reached the gate

For the multitude! Some tattered orator
Held court among them!

Shupham [aside, smiling darkly]. Ah! Ben Israel!

Artificer. Women and men and children
flocked to him,
And many wept! I caught the word "To-morrow,"

And all the people answered him "To-morrow!"
But come! to work! Well now, my friend
dejected!

[Strikes SCRIBE on the shoulder. SCRIBE seats himself.]

Unroll the chart!

Shupham. The chart! finished at last?
O fortunate! [*All bend over it as it hangs
from the table.*] 'Tis marvellous well
done!

The hills, the ford . . .

Artificer. The track beside the stream!
Each detail! Scarce a fool could err therein!

Shupham [*smiling, uncovering the keys*].
And now—the keys! . . .

Artificer [*shews surprise and pleasure*]. Sirs,
this is well indeed!

The time for action draws apace! [*Looks at the
YOUTH*]. Thy work?

Right cunning hast thou shewn thyself in this!

Shupham [*laying his hand on YOUTH's
shoulder*]. Men in the years to come shall
say of thee,

This was the youth who took his life in hand
To serve the people of the Lord, that day
They fled the land of their captivity!

Scribe [*speaks slowly as one recollecting some-
thing*]. The Eagle of the North must leave
the hills

And stretch abroad the wings of judgment ere
This thing shall be! Can it then be to-morrow?

Artificer [*impatiently*]. No! not to-morrow!
much is yet to do!

[*To SHUPHAM*] What next remains?

Shupham. The testing of the keys,
Ere wax be changed for metal!

Artificer. After that?

Shupham [*excitedly*]. A last step more! to
add one other soul

To this our conclave! and the plot is sure!

Artificer [*eyeing him sharply*]. One other
soul? I like it not! Danger

Is always in the mapy . . .

Shupham [*with conviction*]. Aye, but not
I' the one I mean!

Artificer. Name him! Who is the man?

Shupham. Him whom ye saw beside the river
gate,

Holding the people, one Ben Israel!

Artificer [*thoughtfully*]. Ben Israel! . . .

Methinks I heard the name

In the city of late! 'Tis true, we soon may need

A cry, a power to draw the populace,

One they will follow blindly to the death!

The thought is good! Will *you* then seek him
out,

And, duly cautioned, break to him the
plan?

Then meet with us?

Shupham. To-morrow!

Artificer. Aye, to-morrow!

[*Curtain falls.*]

ACT II

Overture, during which the curtain rises, discovering the Southern Terrace of the King's Palace.

The light of dawn faintly illumines the scene, discovering an altar-sundial R. and a stone well (with a shadow) L.

Curtains (embroidered with Assyrian figures) are drawn across the entrance to the King's Palace, to which brazen steps go up from the centre of the terrace.

The overture ends in a chant of solemn joy, which is heard rising and falling in the distant city. As it dies away, a hand parts the curtains, and RACHEL, in Jewish dress and veil, stands on the top of the steps, bearing a small lighted lamp in her hand.

The curtains close heavily behind her. She looks round, and listens, shading the lamp with her L. hand: its glow is reflected up into her face.

As the action proceeds, day breaks on the terrace.

Rachel [*slowly*]. I come from the Palace of
the King!

Last night his gaze
Was large, and calm! as one who sees his
end

Itself accomplishing, the end whereto
His soul has laboured, since the latter rain!
And what shall hinder him? This noon,
before

The sun stand high over Jerusalem,
Gazing pitiless on her broken walls,
Her children, here, sunk in captivity,
Will yet again have bowed them to the dust,

[*She puts her hand to her neck, on
which hangs a jewel; she looks L.,
and descends on to the terrace*]

Clasping upon their necks the glittering yoke
Of old idolatries!

[*She blows out lamp, and places it on
the parapet of the steps.*]

Lo, where the Dawn,
Like some great victory among the hills,
Flushes the farther East with fires of day!
Still are the walls, the ancient citadel!
And yonder bathing pool is black as night
Under the orchard bower! Steeped in dew
Dreaming it lies, like the Garden of the
Lord,

Hung all with granates, vines, and mulberries. . . .
Hark! how the birds do carol to the morn!
As if, each day, the Earth were born anew
In Paradise! and all her sins forgiven!

*[Leans on the dial-altar at edge of
terrace, and sighs.]*

'Tis a wondrous land; yea, and a wondrous
King!

Almost a god! How is it God allows
A man to be so great? Who else had dared
To build again yon broken tower of Bel,
Cleaving the very floor of heaven, to make
His mighty habitation in the clouds?

[She shudders, and looks R.]

I tremble when I think therein doth sit
The great gold Image, that no eye hath seen,
Only the blue-robed priests, and the King
himself!

And yet—I know—'tis but an Image! God
Is here—is with me, everywhere! and speaks
In secret places to His own.

[She goes L., stretching out her hands.]

Alas!

Why are we left so long despised of Him,
The scorn of our own hopes? The scorn of
men?

Is He so great, He never can forget
That we forgot, and lightly left His ways?

Will He not turn one day, bethinking Him
"Where is My people that has suffered? Lo,
Her punishment is past! She hath received
The double at My hand for all her sins!"
Turn Thee then, O Lord, as a bridegroom
turns,

Remembering the bride of his youth, yea, her
That prayeth for his face!

[*She takes up her harp, leaning by the dial.*

O desolate harp!

How should they bid us sound our native song—
Our sweet wild song—in the ears of a strange
people,

Who know us not, and out of our great griefs
Nourish their one-day loves and phantasies,
Lying on silken laps, sighing despair
To idle ears, and sounds of tinkling feet?
And yet, last night I sang—what moved me
to it?

Daring I sang! My heart upon my lips,
And all my song was of Jerusalem!
Jerusalem! The King's unsleeping eye
Was on me: yet, he showed him not displeased.
And the courtiers wondered, looking each at
each.

The Persian Satraps, newly at the court,
Praised me: and then—what was't the King
replied?

“The folk who venture much are the folk a
King
Delights to rule! Take this!” and on my
hand
Did press this ring. My heart was moved in
me,
And I bethought me of the prophet’s
words,
“Pray for the peace of the land wherein ye
dwell!”
And I did pray . . . alas, what meaneth it?
Can both things be? My thoughts are all at
strife!

[She goes back to the steps and sings.

By the river courses,
Where the sad rushes
Sigh in the noontide breeze,
Our harps unstrung,
Are idly hung
Out, on the willow trees!

How can the heart,
Sick with its smart,
Minister to the glad,
Or the captive song
Disguise her wrong,
Forgetting to be sad?

" Sing us again
The great high strain,
The songs of your native land !"
O did I choose
To let them loose,
They would escape my hand,

Summoning men
From the hills again,
With the cry of a great release,
Back to the sod,
And our fathers' God,
Back to the city of Peace !

[She sits playing with the strings of her harp. Enter L. a venerable old man in brown rough clothing, leaning on a staff. He pauses for breath as one who has climbed a steep way.]

Rachel [in surprise, laying aside her harp].

Ben Israel! is it thou? How didst thou
climb

The public stair, that leadeth to this place?
The way is dark! who led thee?

Ben I.

Mine own heart!

This is the hour mine eyes have waited for!
Jerusalem, the city of the Soul

Descendeth out of heaven, even as a bride
To meet her lord! Men shall no more say
"The vision lingers, and the days are long!"
The day is here!

[*He feels his way forward.*

Rachel [*leading him*]. Father, what seekest
thou?

Ben I. [*approaching a stone seat in the angle*

R. of the royal steps]. Help me upon the
step, my olden place,

That I may gaze on the City of the World,
Her beauty, and her poverty, and shame!

[*He pauses a moment as one remembering.*

'Twas here I stood that night, and spoke the
truth,

And lost the favour of the King! To-day,

'Tis he shall bow him to a mightier yoke,

And, as an ox, eat grass before the Lord!

[*He turns his face to the East, and
stretches out his hand.*

Ye twin blue rivers rolling down in flood

Your sparkling waters to the southern sea,—

Ye ships that fold your sails, and safely ride

Like birds, returned from far-off travellings,

Bearing rich spoil under your ample wings,

Gold, purple stuffs and ivories—dream your
dream

A little while in peace! Your hour is past!
To-day the King shall lose his joy in you
For ever, turning his sickened eyes away,
Heart-broken for a greater destiny
Saved for a little folk, a folk despised!

Rachel [*wondering*]. Father, what words are these?

Ben I. Look, girl, to the west!
What seest thou?

Rachel [*pointing*]. Beyond the meadow
lands,
Huddled between the wharfage and the plain,
I see a people dwell, unshepherded—
Nameless—among the many nameless tribes
That never dreamed of royal destinies!

Ben I. Yet, there is fed, and nourished
secretly,
Like a young whelp in the mountain fast-
nesses,
A will that shall o'ermatch the will o' the
King!

O little folk, O seed of all the earth,
Its treasury, its ark of living souls,
That our great father carried forth with him
Out of this place! Though ye have entered in
As captives, ye shall leave as conquerors,
To bless the unborn nations of the earth,
When this proud city lie a thing of dreams,

Vanished in dust, and all her Kings forgot! . . .
Here do I wait the promise of the Lord!

Rachel [*collects herself slowly, as one in a dream that she dare not trust. She pushes back her hair, and points, shivering*].

Look . . . the sun rises! Oh, that he would turn

This noon to darkness, as in the battle-hour
When spears were stayed in air, and captains
blanched,

Fell back, and left the terrible deed undone!

Ben I. My child, the kingly fate doth build
itself

Kingly, and scorns to seek ally with chance.

Let thy still heart its own redeemer be,

Where dwells the secret presence of the
Lord

For ever! on the ark of His covenant!

[*A low melancholy chant is heard
approaching: oo, la la la, lo, oh!*]

Rachel. What servile train is this? Surely,
slaves

Of the Persian Princes, guests of yesternight,
Who sojourn 'neath the vermilion Tower!

[*Passionately.*

They too

Bring tribute to this King! They too are
slaves,

These nobles of the fair and princely blood !
Yet, men would call them our deliverers !

[*A train of dark slaves, clad in loin cloths, pass from L. to R. across the terrace ; bearing skins of wild beasts, peacocks, geese, and game ; cakes and cheeses ; dried herbs, precious sealed pots, bales of silken stuffs, caskets, ivories. Some of the men are bound together by the neck or elbows. They are driven by a slave master with leathern thongs. They chant a wild chant as they stumble along—oo, la la la, lo, oh !*

[*As the last of the train disappears R. enter past them, brusquely and laughing, three gay Hebrew girls from the Palace, looking back after the slaves with playful jests. The child Caleb runs beside them. They cross, bearing pitchers to the well L. One, looking back, sees RACHEL, who stands gazing after the slaves, and kisses her hand to her.*

1st Girl. Look, there is Rachel !

2nd Girl [*laughing over her shoulder*].

Rachel, come with us !

[*The child runs back to RACHEL, and shows her his little wheel, hung round his neck as a charm.*

Rachel. Throw it away! it is a cursèd thing,
A thing of Bel!

[*Child looks up doubtfully.*

Ben I. Nay, daughter, let it be!
To-day, all things are innocent and pure.
The Lord reigns! Let the voice of man be still!

[*Child runs back to the maidens.*

3rd Girl [*approaching steps*]. Good father,
bid that Rachel come with us!

Or, may not Judah speak with Benjamin?
We go to the baths; thence, to the cassia groves,
To dance and play! Thou knowest how this
noon

The Golden Image shall be set, unveiled,
In the sight of all the city? This very morn
It leaves the furnace doors, and the King him-
self

Hath bid us make right holiday!

[*RACHEL stands with fixed eyes, and clenched hands. The girls stoop, using the shadow.*

1st Girl.

Look!

See how she stands!

2nd Girl [*leaning on her pitcher*]. Come,
Rachel! be not proud,

Too proud for old companions! Since the King
Hath had thee for a singer to the court,
And favours thee, they say, above the rest,
Thou hast no word for us!

Rachel [*descending to the front*]. O, say not
so!

My heart is very sick and full of grief!
Have ye forgot the day it is? This noon,
Seven years ago, and yet another seven,
The King did lay our city in the dust,
Ravished her Temple, slew her sacred priests,
And left her desolate! How, then, shall we—
Her children—not rise up, on this one day
In all the year, to heal and comfort her?

2nd Girl. 'Tis true, I had forgot!

Rachel [*bitterly*]. The King, the King
Did not forget! but, with a pleasant sound
Of music and of song filleth the land,
That one sad name be mentioned nevermore
Upon men's lips!

Ben I. [*chanting in an ecstatic voice as one
who has not heard the dispute*].

Rejoice, daughters, rejoice!
The city of God descends, even as a bride
Into our midst this day. Let none be found
Without a wedding garment for the feast!

3rd Girl. Hear, Rachel, thy old friend! he
speaketh well!

1st Girl. Did not the prophet himself, the
holy man
Who sits by the river-side, and shears his
hair
To all the winds of heaven, lay this on us,
Saying, Be reconciled and plant the vine,
The fig and cucumber?

2nd Girl. And take you mates,
Rearing up children to the Lord?

3rd Girl. But no!
This Rachel would be wiser! She would out-
do

The holy man, refusing simple joys
Of wife and motherhood, scorning the youth,
Shupham, the skilful youth, the jeweller,
Who seeks her from his mother's house!

Rachel [wildly]. O hush!
I have no thought of marriage or of babes!
My lost land and my people, they to me
Are child and husband!

Ben I. Rejoice, daughter, rejoice!
Bind up your garlands! Take the harp in hand,
Be ready, for the King shall call for you.

*Rachel [throwing back her head with shut
eyes].* Dost thou too mock me, father?

[*Silence.*

[*She goes forward, and bows her head
on sundial.*

1st Girl [*merrily*]. See, how the sun
Leaps from his cloudy bed, and looks abroad
O'er the rim of the world, seeking a playfellow!

[*They sing as they fill their pitchers,
shoulder them, and go out, making
mocking gestures at RACHEL'S
bowed figure. The child follows,
occupied with his wheel.*]

All night I waited by the spring,
Listening, listening,
Until the bulbird ceased to sing,
Beyond the orchard wall!

O then I heard the morning star,
Sighing soft on the hills afar,
And a weeping voice, where the lilies
are,
Tammuz! Tammuz! call.

Sweet Love, return! no more I flee!
I rise in haste and come to thee.
Open thy breast and cover me,
When at thy feet I fall! [*Exeunt.*]

[*There is silence after the voices cease.*]

Ben I. Rachel Rachel! . . .

[No answer, he lays aside his staff and comes across to her, goes the length of the terrace, then returns.

My child!

Rachel [She looks up wearily, and puts aside her hair]. What wouldest thou?

Ben I. Of all the rest, I thought to find thee strong!

[She gazes at him, moving slowly back, as one upon whom a light dawns.

Must I use common speech with thee, and deal

No more in wingèd words, that, in great hours,
Kindle dark altars?

Rachel. Father, use me! use me!

What can a woman do that may avail

In the day of a world's amazement? Can
these hands

Break down this god of gold, and overturn
The horrible on his seat?

Ben. I. Thou hast thy song!

When all the people come to bow them here

At high noon, be not absent, as some may,
Hiding their infamous heads within their
walls,

Praying to be forgot, a wretched folk,
Serving their God by stealth! but stand thou
here

With the innocent crowd, the young, and the
unlearned

Who come to watch the pageant, knowing not
The deeps of their own hearts! Only be
ready!

The Lord Himself will teach thee what to
say!

I, too, am called : nor I and thou alone!

More hearts await this day in Israel

Than are themselves aware! Now, child, be-
gone,

And deck thy hair with garlands for the feast!

Rachel [with clasped hands, humiliated]. For-
give me, O my father! Yea, in this

Thou dost forgive, preparing me a part.

I am obedient! I will bind my brows

With lilies from the river, and my lute

With the wild red rose of Babylon! for these

Shall grace our triumph! Oh, my heart goes
up

Like a cleansèd fountain, in a song unsealed
Of Love and Death!

[*Wondering.*

Is Death so like to Love?

My veins are thrilled with the soul of some
new life,

Unknown till now! the soul of Heaven and
Earth,

The great sea, and the stars !

[Anxiously and suddenly.

But, father, thou !

Tarry not here, I pray, when I depart !

This is the hour the King is wont to rise,

And leave his innermost room, and come abroad

To offer pious incense to his gods !

Alone he comes ! no second will he brook

Beside him in his mighty meditation.

Methought a footstep even now drew near !

[She looks up at curtain.

Ben I. Child, have no fear for me. My
blessing ? So—

The God of our forefathers bless thee ever,

And bring thee to the knowledge of Himself,

And number thee of Zion's citizens !

[RACHEL bends her head ; and, with a reluctant look, departs L. The old man remains with arms out-stretched, then lets them fall. He looks over his shoulder L. to the closed curtain, listens and walks slowly into the shadow of the steps R., where he leans again upon his staff, as one who bides his time.

Silence.

[The sun suddenly rises and floods the terrace with light. The curtain

parts, and the KING is seen standing on the top of the steps in jewelled apparel, white, heavily fringed with gold. His dark beard is curled and scented: the royal fillet on his brow adds to his height. One hand lies in his bosom, the other rests on one of three short swords in his girdle. He looks before him to the East L. facing the sun, which covers him with its splendour. He descends in its light. The rest of the terrace is in shadow. A dark slave-boy follows him, bearing a tray with offerings of fruit and incense. Boy goes to the altar.

King [descending, raising his hand to the sun]. Bel, Lord of the Earth, Builder of thrones,

Lo, thy servant, whom thou givest strength,
Maketh thee offering!

[The boy has stirred the charcoal on the altar. The KING takes a sacred fruit or cone and lays it on the flame.]

King of many worlds,
Who callest me to build my father's city,

So that about its palaces I cast
A wall in fifteen days, and spanned the flood,
Joining the ancient city and the new,
And raised thy ruined Temple, so that none
In all the world may match with it for splendour,

Be well-disposed to me on this thy day
Wherein I set thee in the eyes of the people!

And grant thy gift of a long and stable life,
And sons to keep my ways, yea, even mine,
Nabu, the Builder, Defender of the Crown,
His, who hath raised again thy sanctuaries!

[He places gum and incense on the altar, so that the fire leaps up with a bright flame. He comes to edge of terrace.]

Before my feet the folk of the earth pour out

Their offerings! My feet they fall and kiss,
Blessing my majesty! Do I not hold
The North and East? Is not the dark sea mine,

And the wide and desolate land, where no sun is?

Proud Asshur swoons for envy! At my knee
She fawns and trembles; for, as a lioness
I have given prey to my city, bringing spoil

To the young ones of my rearing! Who shall
vex

The glory of thy peace, O Babylon?

[*Echo*]. Thy peace, Jerusalem!

King [*pauses, then continues*].

Lo, I have dreamed
A dream that made this earth the chief of
stars,

The chosen habitation of the gods!

Even as in the royal hunt, the lion,

Lord of the desert, yields to the craft of man,

Stretching his bloody jaws upon the ground,

So shall the ignorant nations of the world

Yield to one might, and one supremacy,

One source of bounty and of good; and cry,

Where shall thine equal be, O Babylon?

[*Echo*]. Where shall thine equal be, Jerusalem?

King [*amazed*]. An echo, once again from out
these walls!

But an echo from an enemy! The word

Was changed! What is Jerusalem? A cry,

The cry of an antelope bleeding in the desert!

Ben I. [*coming forward*]. Yet shall her
Kings have power in Babylon!

King [*laughs without looking at him*]. How,
power? My son shall govern from my
seat!

Ben I. Not so, great King! a mightier is
near.

Nergal, thy Captain of the host, his hand
Who laid our city in the dust, shall wipe
Thy son from off thy throne!

King [aside]. My secret dread!
O dark unriddled dream of yesternight!
I saw, and behold—a Being terrible,
With human visage, like to one of the gods,
Stood on the throne; and through these broken
halls

The King as a common bull, tempestuous, wild,
Was driven out to the hills! The dews of night
Wetted his flanks, the pitying stars of heaven
Wept over him! And he, he saw them not . . .
His sense was gone!

*[He collects himself, turns and faces
the old man.]*

And, be it even so,
Thou daring voice of bitter augury!
And one in Babylon arise to rule
Greater than is my son, more fit to keep
That I have builded, know! I have sworn in
me,

Without regret, the Kingdom to the strong!

*Ben I. [comes forward, saluting with his
hand to his forehead].* Servant of God!
Serving against thy will!

Because thou lovest strength, the Lord to thee
Hath given a throne second to none on earth ;
Yet doth thy pride misread its destiny !
Making thy sceptre but a wizard's tool
To serve thy game—the glittering game of
kings,

Wherein thy house, thy royal gods, thy city,
At every cost must win !

King [calmly]. Peace, agèd fool !
Behold the cloudless heaven—the land at peace !
Wouldest thou curdle wrath out of the air,
And rouse the sleeping winds with prophecy ?

Ben I. Nay, hear me, King ! Because, within
these walls

[*KING listens, fretting under self-
restraint*]

Freedom walks dumb, because thou canst not
bear

That men should think their thoughts, and live
the life

Of their ancient heritage ; but bowest them
Under thine own great pleasure, dulling their
sense

With tales of childish gods, to keep them low,
Not giving them that jewel of the soul,
That knowledge of the Truth thyself dost
prize,—

He that is true hath taken to himself

Another Son—a child of tribulation—

To serve his honour and to know his law . . . !

King [*impatiently*]. Enough! enough!
wouldest thou teach a King

How he should rule, that couldst not keep thine
own

Most wretched city?

Ben I. My city is the world!

King [*amazed*]. Ha! dost thou dream of
empire? Then, old man,

I have a liking for thee! 'tis a dream

To make kings mad! Pass out upon thy way;

I would not harm thee! Go! this noon shall
see

Who is it that is King in Babylon!

[*He points R.*]

Enter MELCHAR L.

Melchar. My Lord! the Princes, guests of
yesternight,

Await your pleasure.

King. Bid them to me here!

And let the magians bring the astrolabe,

And read the signs of this auspicious day!

[*A small retinue approach and stand in
the background. Fanbearers take
their place behind the KING, who
seats himself on a stone ledge, built*

out from the altar. The old man withdraws to his corner R., shaking his head. The PRINCES are introduced by heralds, and are followed by NERGAL, Captain of the host. They salute with the hand on the forehead, the lips, and the heart. The KING makes a grave salutation, and signs to them to place themselves beside him.

King. Princes, we know you early risers,
yet,
We scarcely thought to have you present here,
At the ordering of our household. Nevertheless,
It pleaseth us to have your company.
Let wine be brought in the triple-handed cup!
Bring wine of Sesamum, drink of the gods!

[Slave brings a cup, heavily chased; he kneels, the KING drinks and passes it to the PRINCES without turning it.]

2nd Prince [returning the cup to the slave, looking at it thoughtfully]. 'Tis a beauteous cup! I have not seen its like!

King [slowly]. A spoil from the Temple of Jerusalem!

The work of cunning artificers, men
Whom I have planted here in Babylon,
A folk of skill and hidden poetry,
But stubbornner than the mule! Three jewellers
Lie languishing in the dungeons at this hour,
Seeing they did refuse to gem with stones
The circle of this altar! 'Tis a race

[*Sullenly*]

Unreasonable, serving an unseen God
Who bears no imaging of His majesty!
Yet, I must own it! When we broke that
day

Into their holy place, some Presence there
Smote even my captains with a sudden awe.
Nergal, was it not so? Scourge of thy foes!

[*NERGAL bows.*]

Prince. The tale is strange. I have a fancy
for it!

King. No fancy I! A hidden thorn these men
In the side of any ruler! Proud, ingrate,
They mingle not with the other desert tribes:
Therefore did we assign them bricks and land
Yon, by the Chebar, on the great canal,
With leave to traffic!

[*He looks out over the terrace R., his
chin leaning on his hand.*]

Aye, 'tis a stubborn folk!

[*Rousing himself.*]

Ho, there! Let scribes attend, and take the tale

Of yesterday, to add unto the tale

Of all the years laid up in the royal shelves.

[*Two SCRIBES approach, salute, and kneel, with moist clay tablets on their laps, and the cornered stylus in their hands.*

Scribes. King, live for ever! Let the King be pleased

To hear rehearsed the sieges of the Spring!

King [*smiling indulgently to the Princes*]. My scribes delight, it seems, to chronicle

Only the feats of battering rams and spears.

A King hath other victories! Rather write

[*The SCRIBES begin to write*]

How peace and riches fill our borders; how

The usurer may take him but the half

Of what was custom; women walk abroad

Unhindered, and possess their own, in slaves

And household stuff!

[*The PRINCES show surprise; the KING marks them.*

Yea, and their written bond

Is equal with a man's for good or ill!

To the folk I give meat that is fit for them,

Pleasure and dancing, after daily toil;

And a God to fear and know, a God to see

With common sight, binding in proper dread
Their persons to the Power about the Throne!
But, to my priests, my Captains, and my Son,
I, the King, Defender of the Crown,
Discover the innermost counsels of my heart! . . .
Come! Let us hear the record of the night.
What news, my hourly messengers?

*1st Messenger [bows and reads from small
scrolls in his hand].* O King!

Live for ever! From Ārad-il-Sarā,
The King's physician. Be it known, my Lord,
The Prince to whom thy servant went in haste
At the King's command, was stung on the
ankle-bone

By a scorpion. With the favour of the gods
He will recover.

King. Good! what hast thou more?

1st Messenger. In the royal dens, of the
yellow lioness,
A litter of cubs this morn, lusty, well-marked!

[KING nods his head slowly in content.]

2nd Messenger. This night, the King's
young slave, the fair Rimāt,
The faithless one, was strangled at the gate,
By the King's command. May he be pleased
to seal!

*[KING, with closed fist, seals the tablet
with his ring.]*

2nd Messenger. This morn the grooms,
slingers and hunting-dogs
Left for the fences in the Forest Range,
For to-morrow's sport. The spotted hound,
Rigoul,
Limps in the forefoot, and remains behind.

[KING *shows anger and disappointment.*

Melchar [advancing and unrolling a long list, which he gives in pieces to the scribe].

Receive, O King, the tale of ships returned
From Tyre and Sidon, thirty, two, and ten,
Bringing three manehs' worth of ruby stones,
True pigeon's blood, for the vessel that the King
Vows to the service of the god.

King [sternly]. Enough!

How is it with the list of herbs and stones
That I commanded in the Provinces?

Melchar [bowing low]. Let the King take
the homage of his slave!

The lists are done to-night, and shall be laid
In the records of the Gallery.

King [impatiently]. What petitions?

3rd Messenger. Beru prays that his case be
heard to-day,

Touching the barter of the slaves of Elam
For twenty mares and fifty measures of barley.

[KING *seals the petition.*

Nergal [*advances*]. Illah, the goldsmith, waits
without, to show
The bones of the Prince's arm, the rebel
arm,
That fell to the sword of the King, now set
with rings
To hold a torch at the gate!
King [*frowning*]. Another time!
Send me the priests, the blue-robed priests of
Bel;
And bid with them, Nu, my astrologer.
'Tis time we heard the omens of the day!

[*He toys absently with the offerings
on the altar, on his R. listens
intently, looking out over the city
before him. The PRIESTS enter,
and after them the ASTROLOGER,
for whom they make a passage.
He is robed in black, and carries
an astrolabe.*

Astrol. O King, live for ever! The lights of
heaven,
The seven great planets, shining in their course,
Make all thy days immortal! Hear, O King!
When at the sacred hour, this morn I stood,
And, under the vault of Anu, saw great Bel
Arise to take his seat, crowning himself
In the sight of all the gods, a sudden light

Entered the Temple! Out of thy royal house
The glory with a terrible splendour shone;
And all the worlds were silent!

King [who has watched him intently, rises].

Man, thou liest!

Listen! for I, the King, will prophesy,
And teach thee how to read! Do I not know?
Out of another, and an alien house
Arose that wonder; and the moon went down
In fiery shame! I too upon my tower
Keep the night-watch, and mark the climbing
stars.

Cowards and slaves! think ye to gain your
will

With idle tales, and pleasant auguries,
Dreading lest I forbid this day of days,
And check the people? What would ye make
of me?

Am I Egypt, to be cajoled and fed?
A sacred puppet, dancing to the priest
My hands have made, my crown a conjuring
name?

No, by the generous hand of Gilgamēs,
Leader of men, I swear I will be swayed
By none but the Truth! Let, then, the truth
be said,

Now, in the ears of all, that the King may
judge!

A Priest [falling at his knees]. O King,
lord of the destinies of men!

Hear and forgive, for I will tell the truth.

This night, upon the tree, the ravens cried,
And would not be appeased! forefend the sign!

2nd Priest [prostrates himself with tears].

O King, be warned! disown, disown the
day!

For thus it fell in the evil time of Zu,

The year of treachery, when Ishtar wept!

King [looks at NERGAL, who turns away.

*KING seems to recover his calm, and speaks
slowly].* Who may escape the will of the
gods? away

With idle tears, becoming not for men!

Let the day stand! The thing that I have
vowed

Have not the scribes recorded? Vows still-
born

On the lips of a King are overheard in heaven,
And, in the heart of the people!

[Thoughtfully] Yea, and that light

Which paled the morning star, tho' issuing

From some new power uprising in the heavens,

Awoke, methought, a not unfriendly glow

Upon the walls and towers of Babylon!

Let the day prove the sign! . . . And now,
good friends,

Prepare to break your morning fast, ere noon
Already summon us, with the hour of Bel.
To-night we leave the city for the chase!

[Light music is heard as the curtains into the Palace are withdrawn. On the upper stage, a golden table is seen set, spread with delicacies. A row of servants stand behind the KING'S ivory chair in the centre. The KING goes up, followed by the PRINCES, the Court, and the PRIESTS, who part on each side, leaving the guests seated on either hand of the KING. Slaves slowly close the curtains from within. As the last of the company enters, SHUPHAM, the YOUTH, the ARTIFICER, and SCRIBE are seen L. watching on the terrace, as if to catch a glimpse of the feast. As the curtains are quite closed, they come forward. Music fades away in the distance.]

Youth. The King! It was the King himself!

Scribe.

The King?

Verily, had we known, we might have made

Occasion to approach, and speak with him,
And open all our thoughts.

Art. Innocent fool!

Thinkest the King would look on such as we,
Captives and exiles? There is no way but this!

*[He taps a small object wrapped in
a cloth, carried by the YOUTH.]*

Shupham. Where then is Israel? Ben
Israel?

The girl was urgent we should find him here!

Ben I. *[coming forward from the shadow].*

Who calls for me?

Shupham. Old man! art found at last?

The city through we search for thee, and
now . . .

Youth. See you it not? He hath had
speech o' the King!

Ben I. 'Tis even so! I have had speech
o' the King!

[A murmur of wonder.]

Scribe *[gloomily]*. And he?

Ben I. His eyes are blinded, and his ears
Noisy with empty dreams and vanities!
I pleaded with him as a man may plead
With an equal! and he heard me, face to face—
In vain!

[He is lost in thought.]

Art. Come, father! see what we have here!

*[He unfolds the cloth of the YOUTH
and discovers the two waxen keys ;
he chants in a wild voice.*

In the night, at the secret rising of the
flood

The doors shall be set wide! a stranger
stand

In the open place!

Shupkam. And happy shall he be,
Daughter of Babylon! that shall deal with thee
As thou hast dealt with us, and lifteth up
Thy little ones, to dash against the stones!

Art. [to the YOUTH]. Boy, tell him how
thou camest by these keys!

Youth [explaining modestly]. Two hundred
nights it is since first I went
And gossiped with the Warder of the Tower,
On the Southern walls; and saw upon his
belt

The cunning keys! I marked them, link and
ward:

And every night, returning to my place,
From under my pallet bed I took me wax,
And shaped them o'er again, measuring all
With the eye of my attentive soul. At
last,

The model done, I waited hour by hour:
And yester-eve, seeing the keys laid by

Upon an open shelf, and no one near,
I laid my own beside them . . . Praised be
God!

No link or ward was wanting!

Art. [taking a roll from the SCRIBE, pointing to elaborate drawings thereon].

Aye, and here!

See now this chart, the way that we shall go!
The stony way we watered with our tears,
Blossoming into gladness! And, at last
The city, builded fair upon her hills,
The city of the soul! Behold her walls,
Her gates, the Temple, and the royal pool,
The porticoes, and all the columns set,
As they have been . . . O God, as they shall
be!

[OLD MAN gazes dreamily out into the
distance, unheeding.

Shupham. Seest thou not? Look upon
this . . . and this. . . .

*Ben I. [turning his eyes slowly to the chart,
and taking up one of the keys].* What
means the chart? What mean these locks
and keys?

Can wards avail to set the doorways wide
And make a people free, whose ways are dark
And ignorant? Bab-ili! Gate of God!

[*He stretches out his arms.*

Yet mightest thou deserve thy name! In a dream

I saw a people going to and fro
Within these walls, a people glad and free,
Gathered from all the nations of the earth!
Hebrew and Persian, Scythian, dark and fair,
A name invisible sealed upon their brows!

Youth [as with a sudden realization]. Zion!

Zion! Shalt thou be conqueror,
Here, in the city of thy desolation?

Shupham. [turning on him vex]. Son of a fool! Is here Jerusalem?

Scribe [turns to Artificer]. His words are lighted shafts into my soul!

Like sunbeams, falling into a darkened room
Long since forgot, do they discover dreams
And promises, that bide a time to be!

Art. [impatiently]. And are we sold and slain the whole day long

To dung and fructify the earth? and build
Great Babylon? Was it, indeed, for this
Abraham dwelt alone in the wilderness?

That Moses spoiled the Egyptian, and did bring

Her wisdom for a booty? Aye, for this
That David ruled amid his enemies
And made a throne, that throne and king should fail?

Ben I. O passion-blinded boy! Look up,
and see!

The stork knoweth her time, the swallow comes,
And the days return, but ye do not perceive
The hour of the Lord! Yet, what would I
demand?

Too young are ye to read the promises!
Still are ye big with fancies, puffed with dreams
And feign yourselves among the folk of the
earth

Destined to rule! Great is your destiny,
But greater than ye know! O Israel,
Despised and slain, the jest of all the world,
Yet shall ye stand, bearing the sacred ark
Committed to you, through lands and days un-
born.

Kings shall keep silence in your presence!
Yea,

And sit confounded! Though but a little folk
Ye shall be hailed as councillors in the land,
And Kings in Babylon!

Shupham. Have we then dreamed?

Youth [wondering]. For this then did the
Lord destroy the vine

Of His own planting, and engraft it here,
Leaving the root-stock barren as a branch
From which the grapes are plucked!

Scribe.

Father, if this

Be the House of God, here should His altar
be!

Where is the sacrifice?

Ben I.

Son, have no care!

Still, as of old, to him that lifts his eyes,
The ram already bleateth in the thorn!
To-day the Lord will stand in the sight of all
To prove the wheat and the chaff. His win-
nowing fan
Is a mighty breath, and He will purge His
floor!

And though the corn make but a little heap,
Yet shall He bear it forth with joy, to sow
In all the lands. Many shall be amazed;
For, of that sowing, ears a hundred-fold
Shall spring to feed the famine of the world!

Scribe [slowly]. Listen, Father! this morn-
ing as I prayed

Upon my roof, I heard a voice that said,
"Where are the Teachers? Call the scribes,
and see

If one be found this day to speak My word,
When the mighty of the earth stand over
against Me!"

And answer was there none. Then said I,
"Lord,
Behold Thy servant!" And the voice said,
"Go!

Join thyself to the son of Israel!"

Youth [*in amazement*]. O wondrous! this was
mine own prayer and vision!

Then have we prayed at sunrise, each alone,
The same, not knowing what the other did!

Ben I. Are ye able to serve at the sacrifice?

Youth. Alas! No Levites we, but sons of a
tribe

To whom no promise went!

Ben I. It standeth writ,
I make unto myself a kingdom of priests.
That day, the body of a man shall be
My Tabernacle, and My dwelling-place!

Scribe [*stretching out his hand*]. Lord of
Sabaoth, be Thou present now!
Cover the altar! fire the sacrifice!

[*A Jewish chant is heard in the dis-
tance.*]

Youth and Scribe. The Psalm of offering!
have we nothing here
As first-fruits?

[*BEN ISRAEL points slowly to the chart
and to the keys.*]

Youth [*as one stunned*]. Meanest thou? . . .
Then, be it so.

[*He takes the waxen keys and lays
them on the fire of the altar.*]

Here do I lay on the devouring flame

The fruit of many nights and hopes and fears !

Art. Stay ! art thou mad ?

Shupham.

Save them !

Art.

It is too late !

Scribe [*unrolling the chart, and looking on it*].

And here I bring the dream of all my days !

With a beating heart I brought it forth, but
now,

As a chidden child grown wise, that sees his
play

Henceforth but foolishness, I yield it up,

The royal gates, the Temple, and the throne,

To Him whose kingdom is not built with hands,

Whose cities need no wall, whose kings no
crown !

[*He lays the chart on the flame.*

Ben I. [*raising his hands over the altar*].

O flame of earth, receive the things of earth,

O Lord of Hearts, receive the unseen prayer !

[*Gongs begin to sound within the
Palace, with the murmur of as-
sembling multitudes.*

1st Art. [*anxiously*]. Hark to the gongs ! It
is the hour of noon !

The King removes to take his royal seat !

Ben I. [*slowly*]. And I, the place the Lord
shall give to me !

[*Pause. All listen.*

Youth and Scribe. We go with thee ! It is
the Bridegroom's voice !

The heavenly feast is spread ! the Bridegroom
calls !

*[Exeunt R. after the old man, with
faces full of expectation and
wonder.*

Shupham. What will they do ?

Art. *[as one horror-struck]*. Truly, the men
are mad !

They go to front the King upon his throne,
And dare the folk to worship ! . . .

Shupham *[with a gesture of despair]*. And
these should be

Prophets and kings to make the people free !

Art. 'Tis certain death ! Let us not linger
here !

These fanatics are a pest, and bring us all
To disrepute. Away !

*[They make as if they would flee (L.),
then return R., in uncertainty.*

*[The noise of trumpets and drums and
of a wild music increases, as they
are met by a crowd of men flocking
on to the R. end of the terrace, all
talking together. Women appear
on the L. of the terrace, among
them RACHEL, with flowers in her*

hair and round her harp. There is a tumult of voices as the curtains are withdrawn, discovering the KING going in procession from R. to L. to take his seat on the throne L. The Golden Idol veiled with glittering gauze, and holding the sun-disk on his knees, is in the centre, as it has been drawn out from the furnace doors, now closed behind it. Blue-robed PRIESTS are on either side of it. Attendants with great fans stand behind the throne; on either side of the KING are seated the PRINCES; near them go up the CHAMBERLAIN and the CAPTAIN OF THE HOST. Herald stands with the musicians R. beside the great winged doors, which are thrown open.

1st Her. Let the Noviciates enter !

[Enter twelve NOVICIATES, two and two, in dull red robes, through the great doors. They raise both hands to the KING, the palms towards him, cross to centre, and prostrate themselves before the Image, their foreheads to the ground. They rise

slowly, and cross to either side of the Image.

2nd Her. Let the sacred dancers enter !

[The music increases. With the clash of cymbals, shrill pipes and drums, the sacred dancing girls enter, with bells on their ankles, etc., and long skirts. They make salutations to the KING and to the Image; then perform an elaborate and solemn dance in praise of Life. The people murmur approbation. RACHEL watches all, expectant. As they retire to R. of the great doors R., the music fades to its close.

Melchar *[cries]*. Let all the people make obeisance

To Bel, Lord of the mighty, King of Gods,
While yet the veil is laid upon his face !

1st Her. *[with trumpet, calls to the people outside of the doors]*. Let all the people make obeisance !

[The people on the terrace shrink back, as if anxious not to be seen, and murmur among themselves.

[BEN ISRAEL, the SCRIBE, and the YOUTH stand in the doorway R., and hail the KING with left hand.

2nd Her. [*calls in the city, with a trumpet*].

Let the people make obeisance.

Ben I. [*advancing, raising his right hand to the people, and speaking slowly*]. Not so !

Children of Israel ! led of Moses' hand

And Aaron's, through the dark Egyptian Sea !

Silence.

King [*amazed*]. What meaneth now this
dotard of the people ?

Where are the folk that keep my holiday ?

Command them here, command them to my
face,

To bow the neck in homage to the god,

Kissing the dust before him !

Ben I. Know, great King !

We shall *not* serve thy gods ; nor will the
people

Worship this thing of might thou settest up !

The Lord of Heaven and Earth, King over all,

Has set His throne in the hearts of men ! and
none

May claim His seat !

King. Thou offal of the street !

Was it for this we spared thee, when this
morn

Thou didst insult us, as we walked abroad

In meditation ? Did we let thee go

For this, to flout us to our royal face

Before the common people? Bow, I say!
 Or, by my signet ring, I swear this hour
 Shall see you cast into yon furnace flame,
 The fiery house of the god: and who is he
 Shall dare deliver you from my hand?

[YOUTH and SCRIBE *advancing on
 each side of BEN ISRAEL, and
 raising one hand in salutation.*

Scribe.

O King,

We are not careful to answer thee in this!
 If so He will, the God our fathers knew
 Will save us in the flame. If not, O King,
 Still be it known to thee, we will not serve
 This thing of fear and might thy hands have
 made
 To quell the people, and to keep them low:
 Nor will we bow to that which thou thy-
 self

Believest not!

Populace [murmuring]. Nay, verily!

1st Her. [strikes him on the mouth].

How now!

Wouldst thou reprove the King?

Youth.

Yea, when the King

Doth lead his folk astray!

King [in a rage].

Away with them

From the face of the earth! away with them,

I say!

Bind them with cords, and cast them in at
the mouth

*[He points to upper door of furnace on
his R. behind image]*

Of the fiery furnace! Heat it seven times,
That they may learn, that have so dared de-
spise

The might of Kings!

*[Three black SLAVES rush in to bind
them with their arms behind
them. The populace on the terrace
shrink back in fear. RACHEL
watches with a great light in
her eyes. The CHAMBERLAIN de-
scends, and calls to the musicians.]*

Melchar.

Ho there, let music play!
Sackbuts and psalteries! Ye timbrels, sound!

*[The music begins bravely, but fades
away in awkward discords as the
men are bound, and led past the
King's throne up the furnace
steps L. As the old man goes
last, forced by the slaves from
behind, he turns, and looks back
over his R. shoulder at the KING.
The KING without taking his
eyes off him, rises, and begins to
be troubled: the CHAMBERLAIN*

sees it, and calls wildly to the dancers.

Melchar. Women! where is your service?

Clap your hands!

Shout for the triumph, the triumph of the god!

[DANCERS *come again to the centre and begin the old dances; but all eyes follow the KING, who, as one in a trance, puts up his R. hand, as if to ward off the evil eye. NERGAL comes down, and calls up to the slaves leading the three men.*

Nergal. Open the brazen doors! Let all men see

The might of the god! Let down the bolts and bars.

[*Intense red light issues from behind the veiled Image L., throwing it into dark relief as the L. door is opened. The three men are illumined by it, as they are seen to pause before descending into the furnace, the scene being in momentary darkness. The heavy doors are slowly closed, and the light becomes normal.*

Melchar. Ye timid fools! Ye traitors! Shall
I come
With whips of hide among you? Dance, I
say!

[DANCERS *stand huddled, and uncertain, as the KING, very pale, comes down into their midst, paying no regard to them. The PERSIAN PRINCES have risen and begin to descend. All look intently towards the Idol. The people make way for the King.*

King [*staggering, facing the Great Image and calling to his captains*]. What thing
is this I see? Some dizzy bolt
Of sickness blinds me! Can such marvel be?
The fire refuses them—the flames go back;
Like waves they fly and run before their
feet. . . .

Powers of darkness! who is this that goes
Before their face? . . . Did we not bind three
men

And cast them down into the house of
flame?

Lo, now! I see four men! four men in glory,
Shining as with the sun, having no hurt;
And one is He whom I beheld this night,
In beauty like unto a son of the gods!

*[He points now to the opposite doors
of the furnace R.]*

Silence.

Nergal! Melchar! see ye not as I see?

*[The NOVICIATES fall prostrate with
fear towards him. The KING
turns away, shading his eyes.]*

Is God Himself in man? Is man divine?

*[He looks again, and shudders, speak-
ing wildly to the HERALDS.]*

Enough! Enough! open the furnace doors!

Let down the bars, and set these children
free!

By the bow of Ishtar! is there no man here

To do my will?

*[He looks round him distracted: men
shrink from him as if he had lost
his reason. NERGAL whispers
with the PERSIAN PRINCES, and
comes forward.]*

Nergal. My lord, be well-advised!

These wretched men are dead. By this, their
skins,

Their traitor bones are ash! No flesh could
live

A moment in the roaring of the heat!

The very slaves who drew the bolts were
slain

Before the doors; and who shall touch them
now

Till they be cool?

King. O miserable slave,
Thyself command, and see the thing be done!
[*Pointing again to doors R. of furnace.*
See! See! they wait! They wait before the
door!

Myself must I go up to be obeyed?

[*He makes a movement forward, but two black slaves rush in before him up the steps R. and fling open the R. door of the furnace. The three men are seen standing there, in white, their bodies radiant with more than earthly sunlight. They are still bound: their walk is one of exaltation as they descend before the yielding slaves and populace, and take up their place before the veiled image, which their presence now obliterates.*

King [*calling aloud, retreating L. down the stage*]. Come forth, ye righteous! Children of the mighty!

Your God is Lord! Your God is over all!

For who can make him men after this sort,

To yield their bodies as a little thing!
Greater is He than life, greater than death
Who doth deliver men out of all fear.
I, this day, am a beast before you all—
A dull ox driven out to the hills!

*[He staggers and leans on his Captain :
the PRINCES would surround him :
he looks up slowly, and sees the
multitude on the terrace below
him.]*

Behold,
And see, my people! how a King may
weep,
Than whom none mightier was upon the
earth!

*[The people murmur, and kneel, as
with some sudden impulse of
sympathy, and some turn aside to
weep.]*

Nay, children, do not so! Stand up, and
praise! . . .

Where is my singing maid? the child who
dared

So bravely on her lute strings yesternight?

*[RACHEL comes forward and kneels
before him, and kisses his hand.]*

Sing, child! Sing of your God, for He is
strong!

Go to your people! Say, to-day, the King
Hath owned you—Kings in Babylon!

*[He withdraws his hand from her, and
points to the steps.]*

Nay, begone!

*[She descends the steps to the terrace.
The Palace curtains are closed
slowly from within, by servants'
hands, as if to cover the scene
from the public eye. RACHEL
standing in the middle of the steps,
takes her harp, and the folk press
to her, the men R., and the women
L. They sing a song of Praise
and Triumph.]*

LIFT UP YOUR HEADS, O YE GATES!

AND BE YE LIFT UP, YE EVERLASTING
DOORS!

AND THE KING OF GLORY SHALL COME IN!
HALLELUJAH!

NOTES

THE character of the King, the mythological and other references of the play are matters of history, and are studied from the translated cuneiform tablets and the sculptures in the Louvre and British Museum.

The luxury and beauty of Babylon in the sixth century B.C. is hardly to be pictured by the Western mind. Compared in size alone, the great mediæval cities of Europe sink to insignificance.

Nabu-kudurri-uzzur succeeded a weaker father, and reigned for forty-three years. During his day the Empire reached its height of glory. The records he left behind him in various provinces describe his conquests and his vast building enterprises. His name translated means "Defender of the Crown." He calls himself also "the Builder." In Egypt he left a record describing the bridges with which he joined the ancient city of Babylon with the new, and the wall he built about the whole "in fifteen days." This wall enclosed miles of gardens, parks, wharfs, bridges, markets, and temples. It might be said that the whole province of Babylon lay within walls.

Nineveh or Asshur, so long the rival and sometime the superior of Babylon, was by this time humbled to the dust.

Nabu-kudurri-uzzur had the points of a great ruler. A student of human nature, he prided himself on liberal reform and on an understanding for the native capacities of the races he conquered. Without relaxing his hold on them, he seems to have given them opportunity for the exercise of their talents, thus adding greatly to the wealth and power of his kingdom.

Nabu-kudurri-uzzur caused composite dictionaries to be

made, wherein, for the help of ruler and ruled, the languages of several tribes are placed in parallel columns. He ordered also, lists of stones and herbs and beasts to be drawn up in his provinces. Many of these records are as fresh as in the day they were withdrawn from the oven and placed in the Royal Library.

The prayer used in the play by the King at the rising of the sun is, in parts, taken word for word from his own records. Reading these, we feel that we have before us a masterful and singularly gifted mind, with the passions of a conqueror. He stands for a type of worldly empire. Strength he worships above everything else: and to strength only will he bow. Cp. the Book of Daniel.

The incident on which the play is founded may be taken as an illustration of the ceaseless conflict between the spiritual and the materialising forces of every age, a conflict of which Abraham, that great son of Chaldea, was the protagonist, when he suffered the loss of all for the sake of the higher vision, and went out to found a new people.

The captivity of the Jews in the very land of their forefathers is an interesting historical phenomenon. Late study has revealed what enormous treasures of thought and of culture Babylon opened up to those captives. But more wonderful is the firm and persistent faith in the Unseen, preserved by a little company of the despised, in the greatest capital of empire the ancient world knew.

- Stone altar* . . . See stone altar from Khorsabad in the British Museum.
- Shadouf* . . . The mechanical arm by which water in the East is raised from a well.
- Hebrew chants* . . . Mostly unaccompanied. Many old forms have been preserved by the Portuguese Jews. The chant here sung is taken from the first verse of Lamentations, and is said by tradition to come down from the days of Jeremiah. It is still used yearly in the synagogues.
- "Seven years," etc. . . Jerusalem was totally destroyed by Babylon in 586 B.C.

- Ark* The Babylonians also had a Holy of holies and an ark, with cherubim above the mercy-seat.
- Jerusalem* Meaning "City of Peace."
- Rachel* Meaning "a ewe-mother."
- Tower of Bel* Tower of Babel, rebuilt by Nabu-kudurri-uzzur.
- Bel* Lord of Life and the Sun, and governor of the Earth; Anu, lord of the Heavens; Mulge, lord of the Deep.
- Persian satraps* In these years Persia was tributary to Babylon.
- Prophet "shears his hair"* See Ezekiel v. 2 and Jeremiah xxix. 7.
- Bull or ox* Type of physical strength and material empire. Cp. the slaying of the bull by Mithra.
- Twin blue rivers* Tigris and Euphrates, navigated by canals.
- Chebar* The great canal, on whose banks the Hebrews were placed, and where they developed their capacity as merchants. See Ezekiel i. 1.
- "Battle stayed"* Between the Medes and the Lydians, stopped by an eclipse of the sun, B.C. 585.
- Lilies of the river* The sacred lotus of Babylon.
- Sacred cones* Cp. the male cone of the palm-tree in the hands of sacrificing kings, invoking the fertility of the earth.
- Bul-bird or Bul-bul* Nightingale.
- Tammuz* The Babylonian Adonis. Cp. Ezekiel viii. 14.
- Ishtar, the morning star* }
Ashtaroth, the evening star } The Aphrodite, Demeter, Artemis, Iris, of the Assyrians, and worshipped in all these characters.
- "Where no sun is"* Lands north of the Caucasus (?).
- "Thy son"* A weakling, dethroned by Nergal, who had helped to capture and destroy Jerusalem. Cp. Jeremiah xxxix. 3. This Nergal-Sharuzur was the Neriglissar of the Greeks.
- Servant of God* Cp. Jeremiah xxv. 9.